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DAMASC 02881 01 OF 04 110744Z

INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 SSO-00 /031 W

O 110631Z MAY 81
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2172
INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

☒ RELEASE☒ DECLASSIFY☐ EXCISE☐ DECLASSIFY☐ DENY

IN PART

EO Citations

FOIA Exemptions

PA Exemptions

TS authority to

☐ CLASSIFY as ☐ S or ☐ C Sec.☐ DOWNGRADE TS to ☐ S or ☐ C

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DECLASSIFIED
EXCISE FROM HABIB

E.O. 12065: RDS-1-3-4 5/10/01 (HABIB, PHILIP)
TAGS: PEPR, MILI, MOPS, LE, SY, IS, US, XF
SUBJECT: HABIB MISSION: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD

REF: DAMASCUS 2877✓

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2. I HAD LENGTHY MEETING SUNDAY WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD WHICH LASTED THREE HOURS AND 45 MINUTES. ALSO IN ATTENDANCE WERE FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM, DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER QADDOR, AMBASSADOR SEELYE, DAS DRAPER AND POLOFF ABINGTON. IN MY TALKS WITH ASSAD I DEVELOPED WITH HIM THE SAME THEMES WHICH I EMPLOYED IN MY DISCUSSION YESTERDAY EVENING WITH KHADDAM. MY OBJECTIVE WAS TO ENGAGE ASSAD IN DEALING WITH THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THE SITUATION IN THE BEKAA RATHER THAN THE LARGER GLOBAL ISSUES. I STARTED THE MEETING WITH ASSAD BY GIVING HIM PRESIDENT REAGANS MESSAGE. ASSAD SEEMED TO BE PLEASED BY THE MESSAGE AND INQUIRED ABOUT THE PRESIDENTS HEALTH, WISHING HIM A SPEEDY RECOVERY.

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3. ASSAD PICKED UP ON THE THEME OF DIRECT CONTACT AS EXPRESSED IN THE PRESIDENTS MESSAGE AND STATED THAT THIS IN HIS VIEW WAS THE BEST WAY TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS. HE AGREED THAT WE SHOULD NOT DELAY COOPERATION IN MATTERS OF URGENCY AND I SAID WE ALSO FOUND VALUE IN DIRECT COMMUNICATION.

4. I THEN REPEATED WHAT I SAID TO KHADDAM: THAT THE

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HAD SECOND THOUGHTS LATER. I TOLD SHAMIR I THOUGHT SYRIA WANTED TO CONSOLIDATE A KIND OF SUZEREIGNTY OVER EVENTS IN LEBANON AND PREVENT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN HEARTLAND.

9. AT THIS JUNCTURE I MADE THE POINT THAT, ACCORDING TO KHADDAM, BASHIR HAD PROPOSED IN A TETE-A-TETE WITH SYRIAN REPRESENTATIVE, GENERAL KHOULY, A SOLUTION WHEREBY LEBANON WAS IN EFFECT PARTITIONED IN A WAY THAT SYRIA GOT THE BEKAA AND PARTS OF LEBANON IT WANTED AND THE PHALANGE GOT THE CHRISTIAN HEARTLAND. BASHIR HAD GIVEN

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ME A DIFFERENT VERSION OF HIS TALKS WITH KHOULY, I.E., THAT HE HAD MERELY ASKED WHAT SYRIA WANTED, THE LOST "FOUR PROVINCES," FOR EXAMPLE, AND GOT NO ANSWER. IN ANY EVENT, I WANTED TO CHECK THIS OUT WITH SARKIS, TO WHOM KHADDAM CLAIMED KHOULY'S VERSION HAD BEEN GIVEN.

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O 122047Z MAY 81
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9374
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

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EXDIS

MY SOMEWHAT STARTLED ISRAELI INTERLOCUTORS AND I AGREED THAT WE COULD PROBABLY BELIEVE AT BEST 50 PERCENT OF THE BASHIR AND KHOULY VERSIONS. MY OWN IMPRESSION WAS THAT BASHIR FAVORED A LOOSE FEDERATION OF CANTONS. CHAMOUN ASKED FOR TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF THE SYRIANS WITHIN SIX MONTHS, WHICH IS OBVIOUSLY NOT IN THE CARDS, ALTHOUGH IT REMAINS OUR LONG-TERM GOAL TO GET THEM OUT. I SAID THAT CHAMOUN HAS A GREAT FAITH IN ISRAELI CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE EVENTS IN LEBANON. I SAID I DID, TOO, BUT I DIDN'T NECESSARILY WANT TO SEE THEM EXERCISE IT. THIS GOT A LAUGH.

10. I EMPHASIZED THAT THE SYRIANS HAD NOT REJECTED MY DELIBERATE INSISTENCE ON PARALLEL PROGRESS ON BOTH THE INTERNAL LEBANESE AND THE "INTERNATIONAL" (I.E., SYRIAN-ISRAELI) TRACKS. ASSAD HAD EVEN PAID LIP SERVICE TO THE LINKAGE, FOR WHILE HE KEPT INSISTING THAT DEPLOYMENT OF THE SAM'S WAS MERELY FOR SELF-DEFENSE OF THE ADF HE ALSO HAD SAID THAT IF THE GOL WERE TO REQUEST THAT THE MISSILES BE WITHDRAWN HE WOULD DO SO. THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY A SMOKE SCREEN BUT IT HAD PROMPTED ME TO PLAY WITH THE IDEA OF GETTING SARKIS TO MAKE SUCH A REQUEST AS PART OF A PARALLEL COORDINATED PROCESS WHEREBY

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SYRIAN SAM'S WERE REMOVED FROM THE BEKAA (HERE I NOTED IN PASSING THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD HITHERTO MANAGED TO LIVE WITH SAM-6'S ON THE SYRIAN-LEBANESE BORDER) AND THERE WOULD BE NO ISRAELI THREAT TO THE ADF. (HERE I NOTED THAT BEFORE THE CRISIS THE ONLY ATTACK ON THE ADF HAD BEEN A SINGLE ARTILLERY SHELLING OF AN ADF UNIT NORTH OF NABATTIYAH, WHICH THE ISRAELIS HAD PROMPTLY LABELED AS A MISTAKE.) THUS BOTH ISRAEL AND SYRIA COULD TOGETHER GO BACK TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE WITHOUT

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LOSS OF FACE. THERE WOULD BE NO VICTOR AND NO VANQUISHED. WHAT DID THE ISRAELIS THINK OF THE CONCEPT AS I HAD ELABORATED IT YESTERDAY AND TODAY?

11. AT THAT POINT THERE WAS LENGTHY SILENCE. FINALLY SHAMIR SAID WHAT I HAD BEEN WAITING TO HEAR: "YOUR CONCEPT IS GOOD, BUT WILL THEY (THE SYRIANS) ACCEPT IT?" I QUICKLY MOVED IN TO POINT OUT THAT ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO DO ITS SHARE TO MAKE A RECREATION OF THE STATUS QUO ANTE ACROSS THE BOARD WORKABLE. IN SUM, ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO AGREE NOT TO ATTACK THE ADF WHERE IT HAS BEEN SINCE 1976 (INCLUDING HELICOPTERS) IN RETURN FOR THE SYRIAN AGREEMENT TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE. SHAMIR DID NOT DISPUTE THIS POINT.

12. WHEN FOREIGN MINISTER SHAMIR SAID THERE MUST BE AN ARRANGEMENT COVERING THE PHALANGISTS, I ASSURED HIM THAT THEIR POSITION WOULD NOT BE JEOPARDIZED. I HAD ALWAYS TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S GENUINE CONCERN FOR THE CHRISTIANS. BASHIR WAS NOW IN A PRETTY GOOD POSITION MILITARILY BUT HE HAD TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT. I PRESUMED THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE GIVING HIM SOME GOOD ADVICE TO THAT EFFECT. HE WOULD NOT GO AFTER

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FRANJIYAH, FOR EXAMPLE, SINCE THE SYRIANS WOULD THEN INTERVENE.

13. I SAID I WAS CERTAIN THAT A WAY COULD BE FOUND TO GET THE PROPER LAF PRESENCE ON THE SANNIN RIDGE. SARKIS HAD AGREED THAT ALL HE NEEDED WERE 100 WELL-PICKED LAF PERSONNEL. AS FOR ZAHLE, WE COULD PUT IN THE ISF WHICH HAD THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING UNDER THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND THEREFORE UNDER THE MUSLIM PRIME MINISTER WHO THE ISRAELIS READILY AGREED WAS, AS KIMCHE PUT IT, MUCH BETTER THAN AL-HOSS.

14. HERE KIMCHE SAID THAT WE ALL AGREE THAT A RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE MUST BE THE BASIS FOR ANYTHING TO BE ACHIEVED BUT HOW COULD WE GET IT WITH THE SYRIANS, BASHIR, AND ISRAELIS EACH MAINTAINING A FIRM POSITION AND SARKIS STILL THE WEAK LINK? PICKING UP ON MY EARLIER LEAD, KIMCHE NOTED THAT INDEED ONE WAY OF REACHING THE STATUS QUO ANTE WAS FOR SARKIS TO MAKE A STATEMENT ASKING FOR SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL OF THE SAM'S, FORTHAT WOULD ENABLE THE SYRIANS TO CLIMB DOWN FROM THEIR HIGH TREE. I REPEATED THAT I HADN'T YET EXPLORED THE POSSIBILITY WITH SARKIS

I WOULD NEED SOMETHING FROM BOTH THE SYRIANS AND THE ISRAELIS, BUT THE ROLE OF SARKIS WOULD BE IMPORTANT IN MAKING THE OVERALL

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CONCEPT WORK. THAT'S WHY I WOULD GO FIRST TO BEIRUT--
TO NAIL DOWN SARKIS--AND THEN GO TO DAMASCUS. IN
THIS CONNECTION, I ASSUMED THAT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN
WAS NOT SERIOUS WHEN HE ASKED YESTERDAY, "WHY GO BACK
TO DAMASCUS?" SHAMIR HASTENED TO ASSURE ME THAT WAS
NOT THE CASE.

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INFO OCT-01 ADS-00 SSO-00 /031 W
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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9375
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
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EXDTS

15. AGAIN SHAMIR ASKED WHAT I WANTED FROM BEGIN. I
REITERATED: ACCEPTANCE OF STATUS QUO ANTE ACROSS THE
BOARD WITH AN INTERNAL LEBANESE AND AN INTERNATIONAL
(SYRIAN-ISRAELI) PARALLEL TRACK TOWARD REMOVING THE
SAM'S. ISRAEL WOULD AGREE NOT TO ATTACK THE ADF.
AGAIN THERE WAS A LONG SILENCE. DRAPER AND I REMINDED
SHAMIR THAT ASSAD HAD NOT REJECTED THE CONCEPT ALTHOUGH
HE HAD COMPLAINED THAT RESTORATION OF THE STATUS QUO
ANTE WOULD NOT RETURN HIS LOST HELICOPTERS AND SOLDIERS.

16. AT LENGTH, SHAMIR SAID, "MAYBE IT IS POSSIBLE TO
ACCEPT THIS CONCEPT BUT THE DETAILS WOULD BE SO
COMPLICATED." I HASTENED TO ASSURE HIM THAT IF I COULD
GET ACCEPTANCE OF THE STATUS QUO ANTE CONCEPT FOR ZAHLE
AND SANNIN, IT WOULD RAPIDLY ACQUIRE A LIFE OF ITS
OWN FOR APPLICATION ACROSS THE BOARD AND THAT WAS WHY
I HAD LAID OUT MY APPROACH AS I HAD YESTERDAY TO THE
PRIME MINISTER. ON THAT MILDLY ENCOURAGING NOTE WE
ADJOURNED TO MOVE ON TO A VERY INSTRUCTIVE TWO-HOUR
MEETING WITH DEPUTY DEFENCE MINISTER ZIPORI, COS EITAN,
AND DMI SAGI, WHICH IS BEING REPORTED BY SEPTTEL.

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